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TAGS: KWMN PREL KPAO PHUM PA

SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL WOMAN OF COURAGE AWARD NOMINEE:
ROCIO VALLEJO

REF: STATE 99729

¶1. (U) Post nominates Paraguayan anti-corruption prosecutor Ms. Rocio Vallejo as our nominee for the 2009 Secretary's Award for International Women of Courage. Ms. Vallejo's personal information requested in reftel is as follows:

-- Full legal name of nominee: Hilda Maria del Rocio Vallejo Avalos
-- Job title / association: Prosecutor, Economic Crimes and Anti-Corruption Specialized Unit of the Public Ministry
-- Date of birth: June 24, 1969
-- Place of birth: Paraguay
-- Citizenship: Paraguay
-- Address: Economic Crimes and Anti-Corruption Specialized Unit of the Public Ministry, Chile and Haedo, Asuncion, Paraguay
-- Telephone: (595-21) 452-639
-- E-mail: valrocio@gmail.com
-- Passport number: 757819 Paraguay

¶2. (U) Ms. Vallejo has long been an anti-corruption crusader and strong advocate of justice and equality. She has taken on some of the country's most difficult corruption cases, and prosecuted some of Paraguay's most powerful and corrupt political figures. She is the highest-ranking female prosecutor in the Public Ministry's Economic Crimes and Anti-Corruption Specialized Unit, and is known for standing firm against immense political pressure to dismiss corruption cases. She serves as a role model for Paraguayan women, particularly those interested in seeking justice, equality, and transparency as lawyers. In addition to her prosecutorial duties, she serves as an instructor at the Public Ministry's Prosecutor Training Center. Ms. Vallejo takes on considerable risk virtually every day by pursuing criminals who frequently have ties to entrenched criminal syndicates and corrupt organizations.

¶3. (U) The following are summaries of some of the key cases Ms. Vallejo has investigated and/or prosecuted in the past few years:

-- Former president Juan Carlos Wasmosy, who she accused of fraud and embezzlement related to a banking scandal. Thanks to her efforts, a tribunal convicted Wasmosy in 2002 -- the first time a Paraguayan president had been convicted in modern history -- and sentenced him to four years in prison. After an intermediate appellate court overturned the conviction, she appealed the case.

-- Former Itaipu Dam director and current Colorado Senator, Victor Bernal, who Ms. Vallejo is currently investigating for possible fraud and embezzlement as well as possible electoral criminal activity. She is investigating whether Bernal financed the Colorado Party's presidential candidate using funds from Itaipu Dam Binational Enterprise, a government

entity. (NOTE: Paraguay jointly administers Itaipu Dam with Brazil. END NOTE.) Bernal's defense attorney attempted to have her barred from taking this case, but her supervisor instead confirmed her as the lead prosecutor. She faces significant political pressure from several Colorado politicians who could be convicted in this case as a result of her efforts -- including former president Nicanor Duarte Frutos. The Supreme Court has now urgently agreed to review the case -- and the prosecution remains stymied.

-- Former foreign minister Ruben Melgarejo Lanzoni and former prosecutor Juan Claudio Gaona, who are being investigated by Ms. Vallejo for extortion and embezzlement. She formally charged Lanzoni and Gaona with bribery this year; their case remains pending. She has endured both political pressure and provocation from defendants and defense attorneys in this case.

-- Guido Planas, the son-in-law of Paraguayan Supreme Court Justice Oscar Bajac, who Ms. Vallejo is investigating for embezzlement, fraud and forgery. The Supreme Court appointed Planas as a bankruptcy trustee in charge of selling all the remaining assets of several banks that filed for bankruptcy, including Multibanco, Banco Nacional de Trabajadores, Oga Rape, Banco Plus and Financiera Plata. Defense attorneys filed charges alleging that she should be recused from the case for personal bias and prejudice against Planas, but her supervisor rejected this motion and retained her in this case.

¶4. (U) Many politicians have pressured Ms. Vallejo, who is up for re-appointment next year, to drop charges in her higher profile cases. (NOTE: Paraguay's prosecutors must be

reconfirmed in their positions every five years. Many prosecutors avoid prosecuting rich or powerful persons precisely to avoid having their appointments blocked by those well-connected targets of prosecutions. But not Ms. Vallejo.

END NOTE.) The Paraguayan Judicial Magistrate Council (JEM), the entity that oversees judicial ethics, opened a politically-driven "investigation" against Ms. Vallejo because of her anti-corruption efforts. It bears noting that both Ms. Vallejo, and the Economic Crimes and Anti-Corruption Specialized Unit that she works for, have received training by the U.S. Department of Justice and USAID under Paraguay's Millennium Challenge Threshold Program (Plan Umbral) focused on combating corruption and modernizing the Paraguayan state.

Ms. Vallejo's competence, integrity, professionalism, and courage under intense pressures to "not rock the boat" all call for her recognition with this award.

¶5. (U) Mr. Michael Edwards is the POC for women's issues. His contact information is as follows: edwardsmg@state.gov or 595-21-213-715 extension 2129.

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Fitzpatrick